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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 002776

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SUBJECT: SPAIN PUSHING FOR MIDDLE EAST CONFERENCE

REF: A. ROME 2983

1B. MADRID DAILY REPORT FOR 10/25

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Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens; reason 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: MFA officials confirmed reports in the Spanish media that Spain is promoting the idea of a new Middle East peace conference, with the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute as its center-piece. Press reports hinted that this Spanish project enjoyed the support of the USG and the Embassy corrected this impression with the MFA and in response to inquiries by EU embassies. MFA officials said that the Israeli-Palestinian issue was increasingly aggravating other key regional and global issues, such as terrorism and weapons proliferation, and needed to be addressed urgently. One official said Spain hoped the USG would be drawn into and support a new Middle East conference. Moratinos gained support for his effort in the final declaration agreed to by ministerial-level participants at the Mediterranean Forum conference in Alicante, Spain. Speaking to the media following that conference, Moratinos said that the "Alicante Declaration" was more ambitious than the Road Map for Peace and that Spain would not feel constrained by the Road Map in pressing forward with its regional peace efforts. Our analysis is that FM Moratinos is the driving force behind this conference, but that it is an idea that has broad appeal for the Zapatero Government; therefore, we expect to continue hearing about this in Madrid and in multilateral settings. End Summary.

12. (U) In testimony before the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Commission on October 24, FM Miguel Angel Moratinos said that Spain was studying the possibility of organizing a new Middle East peace conference to include countries in the region, the U.S., and European partners. Moratinos said there were "intense" discussions with the U.S. and others regarding the viability of such a conference, which could be held in Spain. A press report on Moratinos' comments cites the Secretary's recent letter to Moratinos, indicating that the Secretary had "expressed her desire for first hand details of Moratinos' recent trips to the region and contacts with leaders, particularly in Syria." Moratinos said that any conference would have to include Syria and Iran, the latter "because it is now an actor in the region, whether we like it or not."

13. (U) Moratinos said that the USG would have to agree with the idea of a new conference in order for it to prosper. MFA sources told Spanish media that participants in the Mediterranean Forum meeting in Alicante, Spain would discuss the notion of major Middle East conference (the Forum included Foreign Ministers and Deputy Foreign Ministers from

Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Malta, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt. See Para 7) Media observers note that the Zapatero Government's draft budget for 2007 includes 550,000 euros to support a peace conference during the next year.

//YES, SPAIN IS PROMOTING MAJOR CONFERENCE//

¶4. (C) The Embassy contacted MFA Sub Director General for the Middle East Alberto Moreno on October 25 to ask him about the press report. Moreno (protect) said that he was unaware of specific discussions with the USG on this issue, but he acknowledged Spain's conviction that a new conference is necessary and said Spain is working to make such a conference happen. He said that France and Italy were aiding this effort and that these countries were working to gain the backing of Germany and the UK. He said that all moderate Arab governments supported holding a new conference. Moreno said that Spain understood that the consensus did not exist for a full scale conference, but argued that outside parties should work to establish such a consensus. He said Spain hoped that the USG would see the utility of a conference and be drawn in by the momentum of events. Moreno's forecast was dire: "We cannot build a moderate Arab coalition against Iran and Islamist extremists without visible progress on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The Egyptians and others saw in Lebanon that Hizballah won the support of the Arab street in the fighting this summer; all moderate Arab governments know that they will be pushed aside if events continue in this direction."

¶5. (C) Moreno's superior, MFA Director General for the Middle East and Africa Alvaro Iranzo, made similar points on October 26 in a meeting with the DCM and Political Counselor. Iranzo said that organizing a conference was a "long-term project" for Spain, but one that he argued was vital because the formerly local effects of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute were becoming global in character and aggravating new

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international terrorism and weapons proliferation challenges. He insisted that Spain's vital interests were at stake, which was why FM Moratinos was so interested in restoring the international focus to the settlement of the final status questions, which could only be resolved through a two-state solution drawn along the 1967 borders. Iranzo suggested that progress on the Palestinian question would also support efforts to divide Syria from Iran. "We know Syria is acting negatively, but we believe they are capable of acting positively."

¶6. (C) The DCM thanked Iranzo for Moratinos' readout of his meetings in Damascus, but noted the USG's own lengthy engagement with Syria and skepticism of the Assad regime's interest in acting for the good of the region. Pol Couns asked what the purpose or expected outcome of such engagement would be, since it was already very clear to Syria what it needed to do: comply with very clear UNSC resolutions. Iranzo said that isolation of Syria had helped get it out of Lebanon, but had accomplished little else and that new tools were needed to address the remaining difficult challenges in Lebanon. He said that Hizballah could not be forcibly disarmed without launching a new civil war, but that the creation of a regional framework might provide a basis for moving them towards a political, rather than a military role.

Iranzo said Spain is not naive about the roles of the various players in the region, but is convinced that a political resolution is within the reach of the international community.

//FOROMED CONFERENCE - "ALICANTE DECLARATION"//

¶7. (U) Spanish media provided extensive coverage of the Mediterranean Forum conference, which was hosted by FM Moratinos and included ministerial-level participants. Participants signed what Moratinos is terming the "Alicante

Declaration," which expresses support for the Middle East Peace Process and calls for a new international conference on the conflict. The declaration (a copy of which was transmitted to EUR/WE) calls for the inclusion of Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority in such a conference and expresses concern for what it terms the "dead point at which the peace process finds itself and with the increased violence between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as with the internal Palestinian conflicts.

//MOVING BEYOND THE ROAD MAP///

18. (U) Further, the Alicante Declaration decries terrorism and calls for short-term confidence building measures in the form of the release of kidnapped Israeli soldiers and Palestinian prisoners. It urges the renewal of a multilateral process of negotiations "based on the terms of reference accepted by all parties at the 1991 Madrid Conference, in the relevant UNSC resolutions, as well as in the clear parameters of resolving the final status questions." It also calls for the convening of an international conference to provide a "reactivation and revision of the Road Map." On the latter point, Moratinos said that the Road Map "is a valid instrument... if it were possible to reactivate it and review it, I would be the first one supporting it and signing it... Sincerely, I don't think it's going to be enough since its calendar (has not been adhered to). Since what has been agreed to in Alicante is more ambitious and more committed, we will work with the elements of the Road Map that could contribute to understanding and dialogue, but I am not going to feel limited to the Road Map."

//COMMENT//

19. (C) FM Moratinos may be the engine behind the notion of a new Middle East conference, but it is an idea that enjoys broad appeal within the MFA and within the Zapatero Government. They appear to see themselves as skillful facilitators acting in support of a good cause. It also helps them work toward Madrid's objective of ending Syria's isolation. We expect they will continue to seek an active role in the region and to build EU and Arab support for a major conference.

AGUIRRE